

United States Department of the Interior
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Assateague Island National Seashore
7206 National Seashore Lane
Berlin, MD 21811
(410) 641-1443



In reply to:

May 31, 2012

Honorable Mayor Jack Tarr
Town of Chincoteague, Inc.
Office of the Mayor
6150 Community Drive
Chincoteague Island, VA 23336

Dear Mayor Tarr,

Thank you for your kind letter of appreciation, dated May 18, 2012, concerning the reconstruction of the parking lots. In your letter, you mention informing the public about this management approach and the possible restoration of some dune vegetation as a great topic for the annual community meeting this year. We truly realize the importance of the beach parking to your town's economy and our visitors and are more than happy to continue providing this service as long as there is enough beach to work with or the parking lot location has been changed. I wanted to take this opportunity to once again explain our current beach management plan and to also state this is only a band-aid fix and is not a sustainable, long term solution.

Although Hurricane Irene did wash away much of the parking lot's base of shell and clay, it did a wonderful job of depositing new sand on the beach and creating new land on the west side through the overwash process. The Corps of Engineers were brought in to determine wetland delineation and to indicate how far we could move the lots west without impacting wetlands. We were very pleased with their determination, which allowed us to move the parking lots back as far as we did.

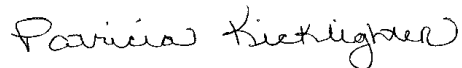
Our parking lot management plan for the past several years has been to create a small berm in front of the parking lots and to set the berm and parking lots at an elevation that prohibits overwash during normal lunar, high tides but allows for overwash during larger storms. The overwash is necessary to develop new land on the west side of the Island. Without the new land we would not be able to move the lots west, away from the ocean. In front of parking lot four, we are even seeing some naturally forming dunes. Because we are seeing new land on the west and naturally forming dunes, we believe our management approach is working. Artificial dunes or berms set any higher would limit any overwash and slow the growth of the island westward. We experienced this when we did have higher parking lot dunes. If this part of the Island was wider and more stable, we could apply our Maryland dune management practices where the dunes are higher and controlled through sand fencing. In Maryland, the Island is wide enough for a wide beach, high wide dune, and parking lots. There just isn't the island width in Virginia.

Although our approach seems to be working, it is really just buying us time. It is not a permanent solution. The current parking lot locations are too narrow and vulnerable and there are areas directly to the north and south of the lots where breaches are likely to occur. Also we cannot continue to rely on Congress appropriating and Federal Highways funding the parking lot

repairs year after year. We have officially commented on the Fish and Wildlife Service's Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) indicating we are in support of moving the parking lots north to a more stable area of the Island and then managing the lots and dunes as we do in Maryland. The exact location of the parking lots will need to be determined by balancing impacts to wetlands, sustainability, and the visitor's experience but we do support having them closer to the beach than initially proposed.

You asked that I let you know how the Town of Chincoteague may help to maintain and protect this important public investment. I believe the only viable, sustainable alternative is to move the parking lots north. Together we can work with Fish and Wildlife to ensure this happens and to find the federal funding to once and for all, make the parking lots sustainable.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Patricia Kicklighter".

Patricia Kicklighter
Superintendent

CC: Scott Kahan, USFWS, Lou Hinds USFWS, and Wanda Thornton, District Supervisor